

Ending Combat Exclusion: The Right Wo(Man) For the Job

by

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United States Army War College
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ENDING COMBAT EXCLUSION: THE RIGHT WO(MAN) FOR THE JOB

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ABSTRACT

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Women have been fighting and dying for the United States since the nation's inception. Yet, women are still precluded from serving in certain military specialties, positions, and units based solely upon their gender. The current asymmetric environment and performance by American servicewomen demonstrate that the combat exclusion policy is outdated and does not reflect the realities of today's battlefield. This paper examines the history and evolving role of women in combat, and concludes with a proposed implementation plan to facilitate the integration of women into currently banned combat positions.

ENDING COMBAT EXCLUSION: THE RIGHT WO(MAN) FOR THE JOB

Ever since America has been fighting wars, there has been controversy surrounding women serving in those conflicts. The basis for the controversy has its genesis in physiological and psychological ideals and has resulted in strategic guidance in the form of presidential directives, Congressional Acts, and Department of Defense (DoD) policies. Through the years, guidance has become less stringent and has gradually offered women greater opportunities in the military; however, policies still exist that exclude women from serving in direct combat positions. Strategic leaders in the United States (US) who support these exclusionary policies do so for a variety of reasons; and, after much debate, it is apparent that these leaders must now critically analyze those reasons. Many servicewomen, who once may have been grateful for the protection afforded by these policies, no longer feel the need for such protection and believe the policies do not reflect the realities of today's battlefields and are a source of discrimination and inequality.¹ This attitude change was reflected in a Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Service (DACOWITS) report released March 23, 2010. The vast majority of 336 combat vets surveyed, 70 percent of them women, said the lack of combat experience will render them less competitive for advancement.²

This paper examines the complex issues surrounding women serving in combat and addresses why current American policy on women in combat is out of touch with today's reality. It further demonstrates that is time for American strategic leaders to review and update US policies to allow women to serve in direct combat units. Lastly, it examines the evolving roles of today's servicewomen, their performance in recent

conflicts, and proposes an implementation plan to open specialties currently restricted to women. To put the issue into proper context and to provide insight into how the role women has evolved from being strictly support personnel to their direct involvement in combat today, this paper first examines the transformation of women in the American military since the Second World War.

Historical Perspective

World War II was a watershed moment for women in the military. Prior to 1941, there was significant resistance to attempts to expand the role of women in the military. The War Department rejected plans drafted in 1926 and 1928 to create a trained women's service corps. Resistance to such plans within the War Department began to dissipate as the threat of war loomed, and it disappeared completely following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, but Congress was another matter. Opposition was fierce—particularly in the House of Representatives. Nevertheless, Congress finally established the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs) in May 1942, the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services (WAVES) in July 1942, and the Women's Army Corps (WACs) in July 1943. Women were thus permitted to serve in the military in large numbers in specialties other than nursing for the first time in the history of the United States, even though they served subject to significant restrictions.³

Following World War II, some believed that the role of women in the military should be diminished. Opposition was especially strong from male servicemembers, many of whom actively engaged in slander campaigns against their fellow female colleagues and from the American people based upon the major change that a continued large female presence in the military would have on the traditional woman's role in society. However, Congress could not stop the inevitable momentum. Over

350,000 women had served with distinction in World War II, and several senior leaders and officers in the newly established Department of Defense supported making women a permanent part of the military. Consequently, Congress finally bowed to the unavoidable and reluctantly passed the Women's Armed Forces Integration Act of 1948. Once again, however, Congress placed significant restrictions on the ability of women to serve in the military, to include express prohibitions against the assignment of women to duty in combat aircraft and on Navy vessels other than hospital ships and naval transports.⁴

Over the next three decades, women continued to serve in the military in both war and peace. Yet, restrictions on the number and grade of women serving in the military continued until 1967 and women in the Army remained segregated in the WACs until 1978, when they were finally integrated into the Regular Army.⁵

The final watershed moment in the military during the 20th century occurred in 1991 when women deployed in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Women had deployed to combat zones prior to 1991, but they had done so in relatively small numbers.⁶ In contrast, women deployed in unprecedented numbers to the Persian Gulf, where they performed a myriad of duties and were exposed to austere conditions and hostile fire on a regular basis.⁷

Opportunities for women in the military continued to expand into the 21st Century. Women servicemembers today comprise approximately fourteen percent of the military work force. They are proudly and effectively serving in increasingly dangerous positions as they engage adversaries on the battlefield. Although women have prevailed in their attempts to embed themselves into the military structure, they

still have fallen short of their goal of achieving equality. In spite of the inequality and the rules to keep women out of combat, women servicemembers are frequently engaged in combat. They are supporting America and they are dying in Iraq and Afghanistan alongside their male counterparts. Of the 6336 reported US deaths as of February 2012, 138 are women servicemembers.⁸

Women continue to be hindered by policies that prohibit opportunities for service in combat. In fairness it is significant to understand that these policies were not enacted for the sole purpose of discriminating against women. They were emplaced to protect American women from the harshness of combat and to prevent the perceived compromise of combat readiness. Just as the history and evolution of women in the military is key to understanding the current role of women in today's military, so is the history and evolution of the exclusionary policies critical to analyzing the rationale behind those policies. To examine the start of the modern policy evolution, one must return to the years following the Gulf War.

Evolution of Combat Exclusion Policy

No law currently prohibits the assignment of women in the military to combat duties, but American servicewomen are still restricted from serving in more than 220,000 positions.⁹ Congress repealed the prohibition against the assignment of women to duty in combat aircraft in 1991, and it repealed the prohibition against the assignment of women to duty on combat vessels in 1993. In so doing, however, the House of Representatives cautioned the Department of Defense that it did not intend for its actions to "be construed as tacit...concurrence in an expansion of the assignment of women to units or positions whose mission requires routine engagement in direct combat on the ground, or be seen as a suggestion that selective service registration or

conscription include women.”¹⁰ Consequently, Congress strengthened its oversight role with respect to the assignment of women in the military by requiring the Secretary of Defense to notify the House and the Senate Armed Services Committees prior to implementing any personnel policy change that would open or close certain units, positions, platforms, or vessels to women.¹¹ In addition, Congress imposed several requirements on the Secretary of Defense related to gender-neutral performance standards, to include requiring the Secretary of Defense to ensure that the qualification of members of the Armed Forces for military occupational career fields that were open to both men and women be evaluated upon common, relevant performance standards, without differential standards or evaluation on the basis of gender; prohibiting the Secretary of Defense from using gender quotas, goals, or ceilings, except as specifically authorized by law, and from changing occupational performance standards to increase or decrease the number of women in an occupational career field; requiring the Secretary of Defense to ensure that any physical requirements deemed essential to the performance of the duties of a particular military occupational career field be applied on a gender-neutral basis; and requiring the Secretary of Defense to notify Congress at least 60 days prior to implementing changes to the occupational standards for a military occupational career field if the changes would increase or decrease the number of women assigned to that occupational career field by at least 10 percent.¹² For example, any Army servicemember desiring to become an Infantryman or Military Occupational Specialty 11B must possess the following physical qualifications: physical profile of 111221, color discrimination of red/green, correctable vision of 20/20 in one eye and

20/100 in the other, and physical demands rating of very heavy (lift on an occasional basis over 100 pounds with frequent or constant lifting in excess of 50 pounds).¹³

In 2005, conservative members of the House Armed Services Committee attempted to insert language into the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 (FY06 NDAA) that would codify the current Department of Defense policy regarding the assignment of women in the military that had previously been open to them.¹⁴ A significant number of House members opposed the attempt, which would have barred women from serving in approximately 21,925 positions that had previously been open to them.¹⁵

On February 2, 1988, the Secretary of Defense issued a policy memorandum to implement the “risk rule” for the assignment of women in the military; however, the rule did not reflect the realities of the modern battlefield. Therefore, the Secretary of Defense issued a new policy memorandum on April 28, 1993. This policy memorandum directed the Services to “open up more specialties and assignments to women,” except for “units engaged in direct combat on the ground, assignments where physical requirements are prohibitive and assignments where the costs of appropriate berthing and privacy arrangements are prohibitive.”¹⁶ Moreover, it directed the Services to “permit women to compete for assignments in aircraft, including aircraft engaged in combat missions;” it directed the Navy to “open as many additional ships to women as is practicable within current law,” and to develop a legislative proposal to repeal the prohibition against assigning women in the Navy to duty on combat vessels; and it directed the Army and the Marine Corps to study opportunities for women to serve in additional assignments, including, but not limited to field artillery and air defense

artillery. Finally it established a committee to review and make recommendations regarding the appropriateness of the “risk rule.”¹⁷

On January 13, 1994, the Secretary of Defense issued a third policy memorandum to rescind the “risk rule” and replace it with the “direct ground combat assignment rule.” The new rule, which remains in effect today, excludes women “from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct [ground] combat.” In addition, the policy directs the Services to “use this guidance to expand opportunities for women,” and it prohibits the Services from closing units or positions to women that were previously open to them. Yet, the policy also permits the Services to impose further restrictions on the assignment of women under certain circumstances.¹⁸ For example, the current Army policy, which predates the current Department of Defense policy by almost two years, precludes women from serving “in those specialties, positions, or units (battalion size or smaller) which are assigned a routine mission to engage in direct combat, or which collocate routinely with units assigned a direct combat mission.”¹⁹ The Army policy further states that, “once properly assigned, female Soldiers are subject to the same utilization policies as their male counterparts” and “will remain with their assigned units and continue to perform their assigned duties” if hostilities occur. Based on Department of Defense and current Army policy, women remain restricted from specific specialties (i.e., Infantry, Armor, Cannon Field Artillery, Multiple Launch Rocket Artillery and Special Forces).²⁰

The current Navy policy, which applies to both the Navy and the Marine Corps,²¹ permits the assignment of women to “all afloat staffs, all combat air squadrons, and all surface ships, and ballistic-missile and guided-missile submarines.”²² In addition, the

current Navy policy permits women to be assigned in a temporary duty status to all squadrons and ships; all units to which women may be permanently assigned; and units that are normally closed to women if the unit is not expected to conduct a combat mission during the period of temporary duty.²³ However, the current Navy policy specifically prohibits the assignment of women to:

Infantry regiments and below; artillery battalions and below; any armored units (tanks, amphibious assault vehicles, and light armored reconnaissance); Riverine assault craft units; units and positions which are doctrinally required to physically collocate and remain with direct combat units that are closed to women; or units engage in long-range reconnaissance operations or special operations forces missions, when such billets are inherently likely to result in being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force's personnel...²⁴

The current Air Force policy permits assignment of women into 141 of its 150 Air Force Specialty Codes. The nine specialties currently closed to women include Pararescue, Combat Controller, and Tactical Air Command and Control and six others whose assigned personnel routinely engaged in direct combat.²⁵

The Coast Guard is the most inclusive Service with all assignments open to women. Although a uniformed service, the Coast Guard is part of the Department of Homeland Security, and the statutory restrictions that apply to military women in the Department of Defense do not apply to Coast Guard women.²⁶

In 2007, the Rand Corporation issued a monograph report entitled "Assessing the Assignment Policy for Army Women." This report found that the Department of Defense and the Department of the Army assignment policies for women are not clearly understood because there is no common understanding of the words used in the policies, such as "enemy," "forward," "well-forward," and "collocation." Additionally, the report found that the objectives of the policies are not clear; the assignment of women

to support units that have a close relationship with the maneuver units they support may violate the “spirit” of the current policies, even though they do not technically violate the “letter” of those policies; the assignment of women to support units that routinely engage in self-defense activities may violate the Army’s prohibition against women participating in “direct combat,” depending upon how one interprets the phrase “repelling the enemy’s assault;” the assignment of women to support units that interact directly with and in close proximity to maneuver units may violate the Army’s prohibition against women collocating routinely with units that are assigned a direct combat mission; and the language and concepts in the current policies are not well suited for modern warfare. As a result, the authors of the report recommended revising the existing policies.²⁷

Evolving Roles of Servicewomen

The current nature of warfare is ever-evolving like a chameleon. Even in the past two decades since Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, warfare has transformed from the anticipated linear clash of large mechanized forces in the infamous Fulda Gap of Germany to the asymmetric battlegrounds of today. Women are in combat—this is nothing new, but what is novel are the evolutionary roles now performed by servicewomen. General Ann Dunwoody, Major General Heidi Brown, Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester, Captain Emily Naslund, Retired Colonel Martha McSally, and the initial class of women submariners are military pioneers that serve as great examples of today’s evolving roles.

General Ann Dunwoody currently serves as the Commanding General, United States Army Material Command, and has had a career of notable achievements. As Commander of Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, she supported the

largest deployment and redeployment of United States forces since World War II.

Among her notable firsts, she became the first woman to command a battalion in the 82nd Airborne Division in 1992. She became the first woman to command the Combined Arms Support Command at Fort Lee, Virginia in 2004. On November 14, 2008, General Dunwoody became the first woman in United States military history to achieve the rank of four-star General.²⁸

Brigadier General Heidi Brown has had a series of noteworthy accomplishments in her career in the United States Army. A graduate of the second class with women at the United States Military Academy at West Point, she was commissioned in the Air Defense Artillery branch in 1981. Brigadier General Brown was the first woman to command a Patriot missile battalion and an Air Defense Artillery brigade, which she later led into combat in Iraq in 2003. She also was the first woman to be Fort Bliss chief of staff and assistant commandant of Fort Bliss and the Air Defense Artillery Center. She later was the first woman promoted to brigadier general in the Air Defense Artillery branch and in 2011 led the arduous and complex task of redeploying United States servicemembers and equipment as the United States withdrew its forces from Iraq.²⁹

Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester, a Military Policeman from the Kentucky Army National Guard, distinguished herself by her actions on March 20, 2005 while serving in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Sergeant Hester was serving as member of a squad providing convoy security when approximately 50 insurgent fighters ambushed the convoy with small arms, machine gun fire and rocket propelled grenades. After maneuvering her team through the “kill zone” and into a flanking position, Sergeant Hester and her squad leader assaulted and cleared two trench lines with hand grenades

and M203 grenade launcher rounds. During the 25-minute firefight, she killed at least three enemy combatants. Sergeant Hester received the Silver Star for her exceptional valor and marked her place in history as the first female soldier awarded this decoration since World War II and the first ever to be cited for valor in close quarters combat.³⁰

Captain Emily Naslund received her commission as a United States Marine Corps logistics officer in 2005. Captain Naslund deployed as a member of the first Female Engagement Team serving with I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) from March 2010 to October 2010. During this tour, 16 Female Engagement Teams conducted engagement operations throughout Helmand Province, Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.³¹

Retired Colonel Martha McSally was a pilot in the United States Air Force. She was one of seven women first selected to become fighter pilots after Congress repealed the restriction in 1991 and the Department of Defense changed its policy in 1993. Colonel McSally was the first woman in United States history to fly a combat sortie in a fighter aircraft and the first female A-10 instructor pilot. She also distinguished herself as the first woman to command a United States Air Force fighter squadron when she assumed command of the A-10 "Warthog"- equipped 354th Fighter Squadron.³²

In 2010, the Department of the Navy notified Congress of its intent to open service aboard its Fleet Ballistic Missile submarines and Guided-Missile Attack Submarines to women officers. The first women for training in the spring of 2010 and after undergoing training pipeline of 15 months, these women are expected to report aboard four different submarines in late 2011. The decision to integrate women officers into the submarine community is not a social experiment, but one based upon sound

reasoning: Women earn about half of all science and engineering bachelor's degrees. Maintaining the best submarine force in the world requires the Navy to recruit from the largest possible talent pool. Additionally it is getting harder to recruit male volunteers for submarine duty as over the past 40 years the percentage of men graduating with technical degrees has decreased from 75 to 49 percent with an increase of women earning technical degrees (an increase from 25 to 51 percent). The rationale could even be more simple based upon the inherent talents that women bring to the fight as stated by a former submariner, "the right females could actually enhance our warfighting capability. Let's not forget that at a molecular level, women are fundamentally different than men in every aspect, and it is this difference that could be vitally valuable in battle. By leaving women on the pier, we leave behind all their different thought patterns, intuition and talent, all of which could mean winning a battle that would otherwise be lost."³³

Despite the many breakthrough achievements of the above pioneers, women servicemembers are still excluded from serving in positions that will place them routinely in direct combat. Senior military leaders already acknowledge the blurring lines inherent to today's battlefields. Admiral Mike Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made the following comments to describe women's changing wartime role, "In a war where there is no longer a clear delineation between the front lines...and the sidelines...where the war can grab you anywhere, this will be the first generation of veterans where large segments of women returning will have been exposed to some form of combat. I know what the law says, and I know what it requires. But I'd be hard pressed to say that any woman who serves in Afghanistan today, or who served in Iraq

over the last few years, did so without facing the [same] risks [as] their male counterparts.”³⁴

Women are not only facing direct combat on a daily basis, but they’ve performed well under fire. No one envisioned that Afghanistan and Iraq would elevate the status of women in the armed forces. But the Iraq insurgency obliterated conventional battle lines. The fight was on every base and street corner, and as the conflict grew longer and more complicated, the all-volunteer military required more soldiers and a different approach to fighting. Commanders were forced to stretch gender boundaries, or in a few cases, erase them altogether. “Iraq has advanced the cause of full integration for women in the Army by leaps and bounds,” said Peter R. Mansoor, a retired Army colonel who served as executive officer to General David Petraeus while he was the top American commander in Iraq. “They have earned the confidence and respect of male colleagues.”³⁵ Confidence and respect are feelings not given lightly, especially during combat; instead they are sentiments that one must earn. Two female Army Soldiers who gained the respect and confidence of male counterparts are Major Kellie McCoy and Sergeant Monica Brown. The rules governing what jobs military women can hold often seem contradictory or muddled. Such is the case of Major McCoy, who can lead combat engineers in war zones as an officer, but cannot serve among them. As a captain in 2003 and 2004, who served as the first female engineer company commander in the 82nd Airborne Division and led a platoon of combat engineers in Iraq.

On September 14, 2003, her four-vehicle convoy drove into an ambush. It was attacked by multiple roadside bombs, rocket propelled grenades and small arms fire. Three soldiers were wounded in the ambush. As one of the wounded stood in the

middle of the road, bloody and in shock, Major McCoy ran through the enemy fire to get him, discharging her M4 carbine as she led him back to her vehicle. Then, she and others returned to the “kill zone” to rescue the remaining Soldiers. Insurgents shot at them from 15 feet away. But eventually, all 12 Soldiers piled into the one operational remaining Humvee and sped away. Major McCoy received a Bronze Star for valor and, most important for her, the admiration of her troops. “I think my actions cemented their respect for me.”³⁶

Another member of the 82nd Airborne Division distinguished herself in the eastern Paktia Province of Afghanistan in April 2007. While serving as an 18-year-old Private First Class combat medic, Sergeant Monica Brown saved the lives of fellow Soldiers in a crippled and burning vehicle by running through insurgent gunfire using her body to shield the wounded while mortar rounds impacted nearby. For repeatedly risking her life by displaying bravery and grit, Sergeant Brown became the second woman since World War II to receive the nation’s third-highest combat medal, the Silver Star. Ironically, within a few days of her heroic acts, the Army pulled Brown out of the remote camp where she was serving with a cavalry unit; because of Army restrictions on women in combat barred her from such missions. “We weren’t supposed to take her out” on missions “but we had to because there was no other medic,” said First Lieutenant Martin Robbins, whose men Brown saved. “By regulations you’re not supposed to,” he said, but Brown “was one of the guys, mixing it up, clearing rooms, doing everything that anybody else was doing.”³⁷

The debate about women serving in direct combat is not an issue unique to the American military. Several of our key allies have undertaken integration of female

servicemembers that place them into situations of routine direct conflict. Two such nations are Israel and Canada. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are the military forces for the state of Israel. Unlike their counterparts within the all-volunteer military force of the United States, all Israeli women are automatically conscripted into the Israeli military, as are the men. Combat units have been open to female personnel since 1994 and currently 83 percent of positions are open to women. The most notable example of Israeli women serving in combat operations is the Karakal Battalion. The IDF Karakal is an elite infantry battalion established in 2000 and it is the first Infantry battalion to incorporate women combat soldiers. Karakal is entrusted with a vital mission for its nation: securing Israeli's borders against terrorists and border infiltrators.

Canada is considered a progressive nation with respect to its policy of equal access and full gender integration in its Armed Forces. In 1989, the Canadian Armed Forces opened all occupations including combat roles. At that time only submarines were excluded to women and they followed in 2000. Currently about two percent of Canadian regular force combat troops are women and they are serving in ever-increasing numbers in Afghanistan. For example in Afghanistan, 83 women served in the infantry, 58 were in field artillery, 34 were combat engineers, 20 were pilots, and nine were in armour. "They're more accepted by their male peers because they've proven they're competent and not because they have been parachuted in just to meet some gender quotas," said Krystel Carrier-Sabourin, a doctoral student at the Royal Military College.³⁸

The value of female US Marines and Soldiers in achieving strategic effects in Iraq and Afghanistan is readily apparent and has led to controversial operational

changes. Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have experienced improved operational effectiveness through the inclusion of female Soldiers and Marines in three key areas: information gathering, operational credibility, and enhanced force protection.³⁹ Three programs have proven to be particularly effective: Lioness Teams, Female Engagement Teams and Cultural Support Teams.

In 2003, the United States Army established all-female (Lioness) teams specifically to accompany all-male Marine combat units into insurgent-infested areas of Ramadi, Iraq. Lioness teams originated from the military's need for servicewomen to be present during raids of homes, at checkpoints, or any place where "Iraqi women's honor" could be threatened by the presence of and/or contact with male troops. Women soldiers were primarily used in these instances to search Iraqi women for weapons or explosives. They also served as a "calming presence" for the women and children.⁴⁰

Female Engagement Teams (FET) are provisional teams that have been supporting Operation Enduring Freedom in seven-month rotations since March 2010. FETs are currently being employed in theater by U.S. and coalition forces to support their battle space owners' counterinsurgency (COIN) objectives by conducting key female engagements with the local population to build individual, group, and community relationships, conduct information gathering, female searches and limited tactical operations. Similarly, the Cultural Support Teams (CST)—an operational concept conceived in 2009 and deployed for the first time in January 2011—provide direct support to Special Forces. The contributions currently being made by FETs and CSTs are receiving attention in Combined Joint Operations Area-Afghanistan and in the United States. From an information operations perspective, their value lies as much in

their ability to engage with women and children (approximately 51 percent of the Afghan population are women) as to glean valuable population-centric information that men might not be able to get. Therefore, it is not surprising that women are viewed as valuable “battlefield enablers.”⁴¹

The Commander, United States Army Special Operations Command recently stated “They [women] are in Afghanistan right now and the reviews are off the charts. They’re doing great.”⁴² Michael Lumpkin, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict & Interdependent Capabilities, said commanders agree that the CST program has been a success. Current plans are consistent with these statements – the third group of CST women is about to begin training, and the tentative plan is to have 25 permanent Army CST teams by 2016. Lumpkin noted that, “We’re coming late to the table, but we’ve recognized the value (of the program), and I think this will transcend beyond Afghanistan...I don’t see them going away any time soon.”⁴³

American conventional force leadership clearly agrees. United States Army Training and Doctrine Command recently published the *Army’s Female Engagement Team Handbook* (version 3) in September 2011 and there is a March 2011 United States Army Forces Command directive that requires each deploying brigade combat team to have nine FETs per brigade, providing three FETs for each of their maneuver battalions and two FETs for each provincial reconstruction team. In August 2011, International Security Assistance Forces echoed the same requirements and units in theater are currently forming these teams.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding, over ten years of demonstrated performance of women in combat and the ambiguity of current assignment policies, neither an individual service nor the Office of the Secretary of Defense have notified Congress of the need and intent to abolish or change these policies. Despite this inaction by the Department of Defense, it is time to end the discriminatory combat exclusion policy and develop sound implementation solutions.

The integration of women into combat positions is not a new phenomenon. The Canadian Armed forces opened up all military specialties to women in 2000 and can serve as a guide for similar implementation within the United States military. The Canadian integration experience can provide great input into shaping training, fitness, and education plans. Initial efforts to train female Canadian infantry were at best dismal. Of the 22 women recruited for the Canadian infantry in its first year (1989), only one successfully passed the 16-week training program and joined an infantry unit.⁴⁵ After such a disappointing start, Canadian officials realized that not every female combat arms candidate had the basic upper body strength and overall fitness to meet the required physical demands and developed specific programs to address identified shortcomings. By modifying some physical requirements (e.g., women must be able to carry a similar sized colleague instead of the largest and heaviest) and focused efforts on nutrition improvement, Canadian military officials have achieved limited success. By 2011, Canada's female troops constitute 8.3 percent of the nation's combat arms soldiers serving in Afghanistan. Overall, the transition to a coed combat force has occurred smoothly, the low numbers in combat units is the result of lack of interest in battle not failure to achieve physical training requirements.⁴⁶

The Department of Defense and the Services have not taken action to amend their official position regarding the assignment of women into direct combat positions despite the successes of servicewomen on the battlefield. However, their achievements have led Congress, President Obama, and others to call for reviews and/or changes in the combat exclusion policy. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009 established a body called the Military Leadership Diversity Commission. The Commission was asked to conduct a comprehensive evaluation and assessment of policies and practices that shape diversity among military leaders. In a report released in March 2011, the Commission recommended that the Department of Defense and the Services should eliminate the “combat exclusion policies” for women, including the removal of barriers and inconsistencies, to create a level playing field for all qualified servicemembers. The United States Armed Forces have undertaken other women in combat studies recently. In January 2011, the Marine Corps establish an operational planning team that meets weekly to explore the necessity of any changes to its policies for women. Currently 93 percent of the positions in the Navy are gender neutral and those positions still closed are under review. The Army recently completed its most recent 2010 Women In The Army Cyclic Review and the results revealed that the Army could open six (6) additional Military Occupational Specialties (3 x Field Artillery and 3 x Ordnance) in 80 units, which would create over 13,000 additional gender-neutral positions in the Army. The Air Force is examining its nine currently banned specialties for assignment by women and the Coast Guard is also participating in the review process. Service reluctance to change the combat exclusion policy is normally based

upon the argument of readiness, but this rationale has been proven to be fallacious in actual execution.

Studies and recent experience clearly demonstrate that women do not negatively affect the readiness, cohesion, or morale of a unit, those seeking to exclude women from combat roles in the military seem to ignore this evidence. This pattern of thought is similar to the views held by government officials prior to World War II who excluded African-Americans from military service for similar reasons.

In 1925, the Army War College published a study claiming that social inequality made “close association of blacks and whites in military organizations inimical to harmony and efficiency.”⁴⁷ Today, with African-Americans representing more than 30 percent of the United States military, it is preposterous to suggest that African-Americans have a negative effect on the readiness, cohesion, or morale of a unit. That Colin Powell rose to become a General Officer and later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is a powerful testament to the success of military desegregation.

In the fall of 2010, one of the main issues debated by Congress and members of the United States military was the potential repeal of the 1993 policy allowing gays to serve in the military so long as they keep their sexual orientation quiet. Almost all the arguments against homosexuals serving openly in the military have been used to keep positions closed to women: Their presence will disrupt cohesion; there will be insurmountable privacy issues; there will be sexual tensions; they don’t (as a class) have what it takes. The policy known as *Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell* led to the discharge of over 17,000 servicemembers and contrary to the belief of many, adversely affected readiness—an argument used by some to call for its enforcement. Of the service

chiefs, General Amos of the Marine Corps was most candid about the issue. He stated that ending the ban in the middle of two wars would involve “risk” for Marines, who, unlike other servicemembers who generally have private quarters, share rooms to promote unity. “There is nothing more intimate than young men and young women—and when you talk of infantry, we’re talking our young men—laying out, sleeping alongside of one another and sharing death, fear and the loss of brothers. I don’t know what the effect of that will be on cohesion. I mean, that’s what we’re looking at. It’s unit cohesion, it’s combat effectiveness.”⁴⁸ On December 23, 2010, in carrying out one of the key issues of his 2008 presidential campaign platform, President Barak Obama signed legislation to repeal the policy. Thus far the implementation of this controversial policy has occurred without significant incident or issue.

Throughout its history, the United States military has time and time again proven to be an apt forum to advance social equality. From the racial desegregation of 1948 to the admission of women into the military academies of 1976 to the recent sexual orientation equality, the military has demonstrated the value of good order and discipline. Such changes in the military have never been about experimentation; instead they are a product of doing what is best for the armed forces and to improve combat effectiveness through diversity. These attributes are essential to the armed forces’ integrating women into combat positions.

The main arguments inhibiting the assignment of women to combat positions are physical and psychological concerns. Of the many differences between men and women, physical variances are perhaps the most significant. Lieutenant General Richard Mills, then Commander I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) and in

command of nearly 20,000 Marines in Helmand Province of Afghanistan, adds credence to this concern, "...infantrymen sometimes carry 100 pounds of equipment on their backs, the barrier was one of physical strength. There is a physical difference between what a man can carry and what a woman can carry. The physical demands of the infantry make it a male organization."⁴⁹ It is true that men are physically different from women, but that is not to say that men are physically more capable of performing a combat role than women. In May of 1995 the United States Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine conducted a study of women's strength. The 24-week study physically trained and strengthened 41 women from different walks of life to determine if the women could be trained to perform duties traditionally only performed by males in the military. A similar study conducted in Great Britain by the Ministry of Defence concluded "women can be built to the same levels of physical fitness as men of the same size and build."⁵⁰

Psychological concerns center on the areas of esprit de corps and combat effectiveness. Opponents to a repeal of the exclusion policy argue that Marines and Soldiers must be able to trust each other in combat and this trust is not always found in a woman. Trust is something that is earned and is only as good as its most recent test. As demonstrated by the actions by Sergeants Brown and Hester, women are fully capable of meeting and exceeding the highest expectations of their male counterparts when under fire in extremely dangerous situations. Even if one accepts the objection of combat effectiveness – men will attempt to protect their fellow female combat soldiers and thereby become less effective – recent combat experiences does not support this argument. Instead, as Retired United States Marine Corps Colonel Paul Roush stated

in his thoughts on bonding and combat effectiveness, “bonding requires three elements: organization for a common goal, the presence of (or potential for) danger, and a willingness to sacrifice. Not one of these is gender-specific.”⁵¹

Proposed Implementation Plan

Today’s servicewomen are facing artificial obstacles that hinder them from reaching their potential. To address the injustices caused by the combat exclusion policy, the following implementation ideas are proposed: Physical and Psychological.

The Department of Defense must call on Congress to end the policy. Recommend the integration of interested and qualified servicewomen into currently closed positions beginning at the lowest enlisted and officer levels. Successful integration requires entrance at the lowest levels to allow for positive growth through ever-increasing positions of responsibility. Leaders must first learn to follow and this is done at the lowest ranks of our military, not at the Noncommissioned Officer or senior officer levels. Initial service at the lowest levels will also facilitate credibility. Credibility is essential, as women progress through promotions to become Infantry Company Commanders and Squad Leaders; they must possess sound understanding of the basics of their combat specialty. Effective integration for these pioneers into combat positions also requires senior level oversight and mentorship. Assignment of a senior female Supply Officer aboard a submarine or female Adjutant in an Infantry brigade to mentor and serve as a role model is essential to success and possibly even post-first term retention. The importance of mentorship and support is well stated by Vice Admiral Carol Pottenger in her keynote address at the 2011 Women’s Surface Force Waterfront Symposium, “To the women coming up behind you, show them they can do anything and be anything they want to be...”⁵² The Services must apply gender-neutral

physical standards for all military positions and specialty schools. For example, a female servicemember who is attempting to earn either the coveted SEAL Trident or Ranger Tab must meet the same physical standards as their male counterparts.

The Services must educate servicemembers on the change to integrate combat positions. Similar to the recently conducted Don't Ask, Don't Tell training, leaders should educate on the changes, responsibilities of servicemembers, and the forums available to women if they are harassed/mistreated/assaulted. The goal of the training is to educate servicemembers on the transformation occurring within their respective Services rather than to attempt to alter their personal values.

Conclusion

In reflecting on the War on Terror, the well-respected military expert Dr. John Nagl stated, "we literally could not have fought this war without women."⁵³ Women serve in Afghanistan and Iraq with pride and honor. In both war zones, many of the distinctions regarding combat have constantly blurred because there are no front lines, and direct ground combat is not isolated to being well forward on the battlefield- it is asymmetrical. Current Department of Defense and Service doctrine and policy have outlived past usefulness and clearly call for revision to reflect current realities. The combat exclusion policy does not allow the United States military to man its ranks with the best possible Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines as the rule disregards the immense talents inherent in the excluded 51 percent of our population. Especially in a time of war, we need to pick the best "man" for every job, even if she is a woman.⁵⁴

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